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High south winds have been drying the Shortgrass Country. Spring has ended; needlegrass and heat have opened the annual lamb wilt.

As a last effort to save the late lambs, we have been doctoring for internal parasites. The roundup scene has been dreary. Short counts and long re-rides add to the curse of hot days.

Sheep hunters scored lots of fouls and plenty of tips. In some of the pastures the ewes had broken into big bunches for our to small groups of two. Of the many things wrong with ah June sheep exercise, the companionship that the sheep choose is the worst. Wobbly sick ones pair off with the fleet wild ones. The herder needs a horse that'll adjust his speed from low snail gear to a frenzied burst.

Just as the fast mover makes a break, the infirm sister will lie down. When the wild sheep is roped or contained, a sudden onset of good health revives the other ewe.

Sheep wranglers must be men of high patience and low tolerance for comfort. For the world knows of no other occupation that is done on a piecemeal basis over such a large scope of country for so little amount of gain.

Sheep ranching is a special craft, too. Nature, you see, culls all species except sheep by eliminating the weakest. The reverse is true of the woolie. Every spring, shortly before the wool harvest and well in advance of the lamb shipping, the fat and the thrifty ewes stage a big die-off. On the same range, frail mothers stagger from poison weed to thorned cactus, trailing a lamb in a state of near decomposition, only to survive and make it another year.

I think the story of the Shortgrass sheep industry should be rated among the natural phenomena of the universe. For a century, the flocks have flirted with extinction. Perhaps it would be better to say they have searched for means of extinction.

These mothers have led their young to open ground below the great eagle flyaways from Mexico. Poison weeds were digested within easy reach of bobcat lairs. Thousands of penfuls were treated for their ills. Repayment was made in doggie lambs and dead wool.

It could well be that the woolies are too stubborn to die at the same time. It could be that their opinion of life and man is so low that they won't bother to die. All they ever see are herders, truck drivers, sheep shearers, and an occasional glimpse of the hombres who hang out around auction rings.

Think about that. The tenderest Sunday School teacher to ever press a rose in her dream book would be changed by encounters. The story of Mary and her fabled lamb might be true. Dogs are influenced by their master's personality. Why not sheep?

You know, in the pictures in the Bible, the shepherds weren't booting their sheep off triple deck trucks. Their crooks weren't loaded with hotshot batteries, either.

I'm going to take the old devil's side for once. I never had thought what a sorry outlook sheep must have, being choused down alleys and thrown over backwards down steep chutes. I bet we'd all be cantankerous under those circumstances.

Sheep will have to stay in the Shortgrass Country. Out here an old cow has to have at least two sacks of cake to get through the winter. Without the lamb and wool money we couldn't afford the decals that the cattleman's association puts out.

The morning cool burns fast in the sheep pens. Horses stand tied, guarding the amount of strength they need to fight flies. Men sweat in the dust and the sun. It's no wonder nothing romantic has ever come from the sheep game.